

# Actualité en France

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## 2010, International Year of Biodiversity: what challenges does France face?

The United Nations has designated 2010 as International Year of Biodiversity. The aim is to mobilise the international community around the wealth and fragility of biological diversity in order to contain an ever-growing range of threats (such as increasing urbanisation, deforestation, agricultural practices and pollution). It is also about taking the first steps towards real change. To do this, the French government has put in place a national plan, developed by a steering committee made up of scientists, public authorities, businesses and the voluntary sector. The programme features a wide array of initiatives. This international mobilisation is an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the crucial role biodiversity plays in the long-term survival of life on Earth.



Biodiversity is life  
Biodiversity is our life

All the countries that signed the Convention on Biological Diversity at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 made an undertaking to protect and restore biodiversity. At the Johannesburg Summit in 2002, world leaders set themselves a more tangible objective: halting the decline in biodiversity by 2010. Well, here we are! But the targets have not been reached. Like the fight against climate change, protecting biodiversity represents a major environmental challenge, now more than ever.

What is biodiversity? It is the very fabric of life and is in a constant state of flux: we are all a part of it and we all depend on it. Biodiversity is also a network of interactions and interdependencies between billions of living creatures and tens of millions of species. Biodiversity supports many of the processes and functions of natural ecosystems such as controlling air and water quality, regulating climate, combating parasites, ensuring pollination and preventing erosion. Food systems are also highly dependent on biodiversity, and a significant proportion (40 to 70%) of our medications rely on it.

“2010 will be the year we mobilise on behalf of biodiversity,” announced the State Secretary for Ecology at UNESCO, Chantal Jouanno. A series of initiatives and meetings are planned, starting with the production of an inventory of biodiversity in France. According to biologists, while 1.9 million species of animals, plants and micro-organisms have currently been identified around the world, there



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may be between ten and 100 million yet to discover. The whole of France has been asked to contribute, rather than just specialists. People living in both urban areas and the countryside are invited to make an inventory of the species of birds, butterflies and pollinators in their gardens or on their balconies. A dedicated website has been set up where they can upload the information they have gathered.

As far as the measures announced by the public authorities are concerned, “*131 conservation and protection plans have been put in place for species threatened with extinction, and there are plans to create new marine parks*”. According to Chantal Jouanno, “*the aim is to protect 20% of our marine areas.*” In addition, the French Ministry of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and the Sea intends to increase its educational activities, with a Festival of Nature from 19 to 23 June and “a national picnic on 21 May”. The National Museum of Natural History and numerous other organisations are already involved.

Today there are 34 areas around the world with a very high number of species facing a particularly significant threat. One of these is the Mediterranean basin. Scientists are already involved in numerous environmental protection projects. In the heart of the Amazon rainforest, which is home to an exceptionally diverse range of species, around 50 researchers from the French National Scientific Research Centre (CNRS) are taking part in the ambitious *Amazonia* programme. The aim is to unlock the secrets of the world’s richest forest, which covers an area of some 4 million sq km in nine countries.

“*The Ecology and Environment Institute (INEE) at the CNRS has developed numerous relationships outside France in the context of International Research Groups (GDRI) such as the “Biodiversity and sustainable development in Madagascar” group and the “Biodiversity of infectious diseases in Vietnam” group,*” according to Françoise Gaill, Scientific Director at the INEE. “*The Insular Research Centre and Environmental Observatory (CRIOBE), a service and research unit at the CNRS, has also taken action on the coral reefs in French Polynesia, particularly Tahiti. A special partnership has been set up between the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the CNRS, and together with Israel we will be organising a major symposium in April on a number of common themes: water, toxicology, population genetics, resistance to drought, and so on.*”

Researchers at the Research for Development Institute (IRD) are working in partnership with France’s overseas regions and countries in the southern hemisphere. They are particularly active in Africa and Latin America. “*My work in the Amazon region focuses on problems involving aquatic biodiversity. Some more theoretical research is being carried out to identify and understand the factors that affect biodiversity: its emergence, distribution and maintenance. More applied research is being done to answer some of our partners’ questions, such as examining the impact of the proposed dam on the Rio Madeira in Bolivia and in Brazil, or evaluating mercury contamination in the Itenez basin in Bolivia,*” explains Marc Pouilly, a researcher at the IRD’s Aquatic Ecology department.

Annik Bianchini

Websites

<http://www.biodiversite2010.fr>: the French portal for International Year of Biodiversity

[www.cnrs.fr](http://www.cnrs.fr): National Scientific Research Centre

[www.ird.fr](http://www.ird.fr): Research for Development Institute

[www.mnhn.fr](http://www.mnhn.fr): National Museum of Natural History